

# COGNITIVISM

# Cognitivism And English Language Teaching

- ▶ Cognitivism was emerged as a reaction to Behaviorism.
- ▶ Cognitivists opposed to behaviourists because they felt that behaviourists ignored the role of thinking in learning.
- ▶ The Cognitive Psychology was born in the late 1950s as a dominant learning theory and its impact was seen in language learning in 1970s.
- ▶ Cognitivism is a learning theory that focuses on the processes involved in learning rather than on the observed behavior. As opposed to Behaviorists, Cognitivists do not require an outward exhibition of learning, but focus more on the internal processes and connections that take place during learning. Cognitivism contends that “the black box” of the mind should be opened and understood. The learner is viewed as an information processor. Knowledge can be seen as schema or symbolic mental constructions and learning is defined as change in a learner’s schemata. Some important classroom principles from cognitive psychology include meaningful learning, organization, and elaboration.
- ▶ According to Cognitive theory of learning, second language acquisition is a conscious and thinking process. In other words, one can say that language learning is a mental activity.

- ▶ Cognitivist theory developed as a reaction to Behaviorism. Cognitivists objected to behaviorists because they felt that behaviorists thought learning was simply a reaction to a stimulus and ignored the idea that thinking plays an important role. One of the most famous criticisms addressed to Behaviorism was Chomsky's argument that language could not be acquired purely through conditioning, and must be at least partly explained by the existence of some inner abilities. Behaviorism for example falls short to explain how children can learn an infinite number of utterance that they have never heard of.

## The role of the learner:

- ▶ The learners according to cognitivists are active participants in the learning process. They use various strategies to process and construct their personal understanding of the content to which they are exposed. Students are not considered anymore as recipients that teachers fill with knowledge, but as active participants in the learning.

A few of the **cognitivists** who have contributed to developing the cognitive theory are the following:

- ▶ Jean Piaget
- ▶ Lev Vygotsky
- ▶ Jerome Bruner
- ▶ David Ausubel

- ▶ The well-known cognitive theories and their applications in teaching language are as follows:

# Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory and Language Teaching:-

- ▶ He worked on the relation between language development and its functional use and mental development of the child.
- ▶ He divided the cognitive development of a child into four stages i.e. Sensorimotor (birth-02 years), Pre-Operational (02-07 years), Concrete-Operational (07-11 years) and Formal-Operational (12-adulthood). For the completion of the cognitive development process of an individual, all these stages are mandatory. The applications of his theory in language teaching are found as under:
- ▶ During the Sensorimotor stage, the child uses his five senses and his/her increasing motor skills to explore the environment. He/she begins to use language to imitate and represent the environment. At this stage the child is egocentric and he/she learns either by the means of assimilation (to incorporate new ideas into an existing concept) or by accommodation (to develop new concept by adapting the old one). From this concept of Piaget, a language teacher must understand the fact that at the initial stage he/she do all those things that the child wants because of his/her egocentric nature. The teacher also needs to present the resemble objects before the child to assimilate or accommodate language learning at nursery or pre-nursery stage.
- ▶ During the Pre-operational stage, the child's memory and imagination develops more. He/she usually asks questions to the teachers and it is the responsibility of the teachers to respond to them comfortably. At this stage, much egocentric thinking also occurs that is why teachers have to fulfil his/her demands and they have to create a suitable situation as per the child's wishes. At this stage, he/she can speak and print word. He/she can speak words and write words. So, the language teachers need to speak new words and write new words to boost their vocabulary.

- ▶ During the Concrete-operational stage, the child is no more egocentric but he/she can understand the views of other people also. Now he can think about real concrete things. He/she begins to understand cause and effect. So, it is the right time for a language teacher to begin to teach simple grammar.
- ▶ During the Formal-operational stage, the child is able to use logic and abstract thinking. He/she asks questions on previously accepted thoughts, ideas and values. Now the teacher can give reasons why it is this and why it is that? He/she can clear the language complexities to his/her students by giving reasons. May be a language student will ask “Why should I learn grammar?, Why should I have to read Shakespeare’s biography?, Why I need more vocabularies?, Why is poetry read aloud and why prose is not?” Piaget’s Schema theory tells the teachers not to repeat all those things which were already known to the child but instead they have to build on their prior knowledge. For example; If a teacher has to give the answers of some given questions at the end of an English play, he/she should not repeat the events of that play by him/herself but instead he/she should ask the students what has happened?, why it happened? And how has it happened?



## Maria Montessori's Cognitive Psychology and Language Teaching:-

- ▶ The name Montessori is very familiar in the world because the Montessori Method of “Early Childhood Education” is attributed to her works. She was a cognitive psychologist and did two major things:
- ▶ She taught difficult children to read at a normal level at a psychiatric clinic at the University of Rome. Teachers normally teach reading in two ways; I) The teacher reads a sentence or a part of it and the entire class repeat it in a chorus and this process goes on till the completion of the paragraph or the page. II) Have students read a sentence at a time in succession. But at her clinic, Montessori's method of teaching was different from these two. She involved the students with the text through questions, through predictions, through anticipations and moving the students at their pace. If she was succeeded to teach reading to her “difficult children” by applying this method then in case of normal students, the teachers will definitely be successful to teach reading through the same method.
- ▶ According to cognitive psychology, if the teachers want young people to be reading, they will have to be involved in reading. In other words, this success story of Montessori gives the idea that students will learn to read by actively being engaged in the reading process.

- ▶ In 1906, she was asked to start a progressive school for slum children in Italy and the name of the school was kept as “Casa Dei Bambini” or “Children’s House”. She again became successful to teach slum children by actively involving them in the learning process. These were slum children and they were never been to schools, but she did her job nicely. She uses active learning and brought the real world to the slum area classrooms. No doubt, active learning is an excellent approach in teaching learning process in general and language learning in particular. So, teachers need to think the using of this one in the actual classroom situations.